



Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

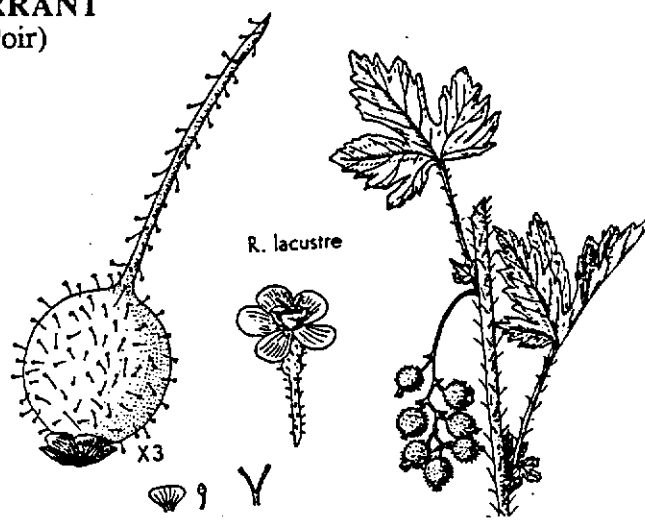
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MASSACHUSETTS SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN

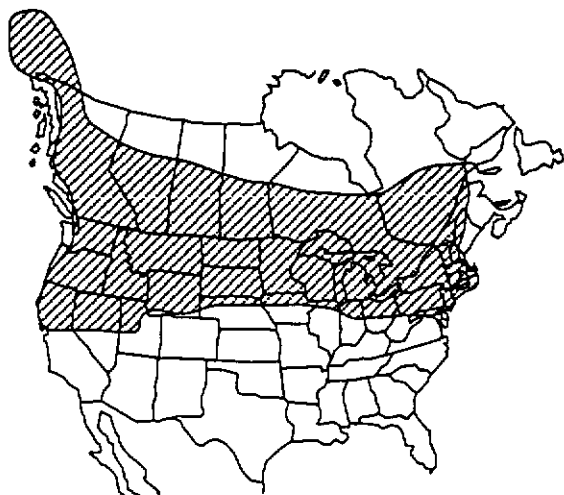
BRISTLY BLACK CURRANT (*Ribes lacustre* (Pers.) Poir)

DESCRIPTION: Bristly black currant is a low, bristly to spiny, straggling shrub measuring up to 1 meter (3 ft.) in height. Its leaves are deeply cut with three to five lobes and heart shaped bases. The leaves are alternate, simple, and deciduous with leaf blades measuring 4 - 8 cm (1.5 - 3 in.) in both length and width. Flowers are yellowish-green to pinkish, have fan-shaped to semicircular petal lobes, and are about 0.5 cm (less than 0.25 in.) in diameter. The bristly purple-black fruits are arranged on drooping racemes (five or more flowers or fruits arranged around a central stem) and have a disagreeable taste. When crushed, the twigs and fruits have a skunky odor. Flowering is from May through early June, with the fruits appearing in July.

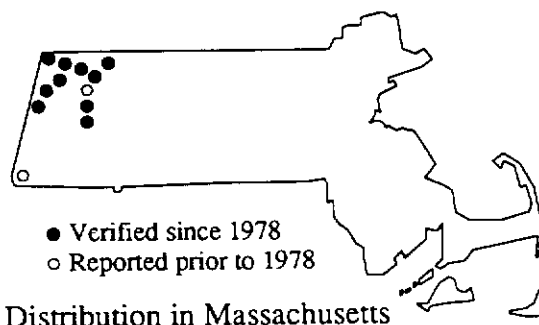
SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS: It is often difficult to distinguish between species in the genus *Ribes*. Bristly black currant is the most bristly, but others may have bristles as well. Flowers and fruits make identification much simpler. Smooth gooseberry (*Ribes hirtellum*) is very similar to bristly black currant; however the broken twigs and fruit do not have a foul odor, the fruits are not bristly, and leaves are never as deeply cut as those of *R. lacustre*. Skunk currant (*R. glandulosum*) may grow in the same places as bristly black currant but has spineless stems.



Gleason, H. A. The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern U.S. and Adjacent Canada New York Botanical Garden, 1952.



Documented Range of
Bristly Black Currant



HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS: Bristly black currant is usually found along ledges and margins of cool rushing streams in higher altitudes where woods are cool. Other habitats include steep, rocky ravines, borders of swamps in upland regions, and wet areas on rocky wooded slopes. The shrub seems to do best where shaded to filtered light and wet soil occur together, although one occurrence is in a mesic-dry region. It is generally in association with northern hardwoods-hemlock forest species such as yellow birch, white birch, red spruce, American mountain-ash, striped maple, and hobblebush.

RANGE: Bristly black currant is found from Labrador to Alaska, south to Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and California. Recently a disjunct population was found in the mountains of Virginia.

POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS: Bristly black currant is listed as a "Species of Special Concern" in Massachusetts. As with all species listed in Massachusetts, individuals of the species are protected from take (picking, collecting, killing...) and sale under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. There are 19 current populations (discovered or relocated since 1978) in 10 towns and 2 historical sites (unverified since 1978) in 2 additional towns in the Commonwealth. Bristly black currant is frequent near Mt. Greylock, Berkshire Co., and sporadic elsewhere. It is also considered rare in Connecticut, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Bristly black currant is near the southern limit of its range in Massachusetts and is apparently intolerant of sustained high temperatures. A campaign to eliminate this genus in the 1920's and 30's as alternate host for the White Pine Blister Rust may have eliminated some old occurrences.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS: As with most rare plants, exact needs for management of bristly black currant are not known. The following advice comes from observations of the populations in Massachusetts. Foot traffic on steep slopes may cause damage through trampling or erosion. However, casual visitation by the general public may not be a factor because of the rather challenging terrain this species is found. To preserve any of our listed species, a certain amount of typical habitat must be preserved. The moisture regimes or soil moisture should not be disturbed. If there is disturbance around the plants, such as removing the canopy or disturbing the soil, this is apt to encourage weedy alien plants to take over and crowd out the rare species. This is a universal concern in any management effort around rare plant sites. Bristly black currant appears to do well in the shade, and does not seem to need opening of the sites.